

- **KQED**
- [TV](#)
- |
- [RADIO](#)
- |
- [COMMUNITY](#)
- |
- [NEWS](#)
- |
- [ARTS](#)
- |
- [FOOD](#)
- |
- [SCIENCE](#)
- |
- [EDUCATION](#)
- |
- [SUPPORT KQED](#)
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- [ABOUT KQED](#)



- [Blog Home](#)
- [Tag Cloud](#)

• Recent Posts

- [No Shockers in White House Climate Report](#)
- [Speed Bumps on the "Hydrogen Highway"](#)
- [Transportation's Tricky Carbon Footprint](#)
- [Head-to-Head: Chevron and The Sierra Club](#)
- [New Report Finds More Clean Energy Would Grow CA Economy](#)
- [Ag and Water: Making Do with Less](#)
- [River Diaries, Part 4: Homecoming](#)
- [The Return of El Nino?](#)
- [River Diaries, Part 3: Encounters with Civilization](#)
- [Global Call for Climate Change Stories](#)

• Recent Comments

- Steve Bloom on [No Shockers in White House Climate Report](#)
- Craig Miller on [No Shockers in White House Climate Report](#)
- Russell Steele on [No Shockers in White House Climate Report](#)
- Steve Bloom on [No Shockers in White House Climate Report](#)
- Russell Steele on [No Shockers in White House Climate Report](#)

• Categories

- [Agriculture](#)
- [Air](#)
- [Alpine](#)
- [Coastal](#)
- [Conservation](#)
- [Cryosphere](#)
- [Desert](#)
- [Economics](#)
- [Ecosystems](#)
- [Emissions](#)
- [Energy](#)
- [Fisheries](#)

- [Health](#)
- [International](#)
- [Oceans](#)
- [Policy](#)
- [Temperature](#)
- [Transportation](#)
- [Uncategorized](#)
- [Urban Planning](#)
- [Warming](#)
- [Water](#)
- [Wetlands](#)
- [Wildfire](#)
- [Wildlife](#)

• Archives

- [June 2009](#)
- [May 2009](#)
- [April 2009](#)
- [March 2009](#)
- [February 2009](#)
- [January 2009](#)
- [December 2008](#)
- [November 2008](#)
- [October 2008](#)
- [September 2008](#)

• Climate News Blogs

- [Climate Feedback](#)
- [CNET Green Tech](#)
- [DotEarth](#)
- [Environment 360](#)
- [Environmental Capital](#)
- [Green Inc.](#)
- [Sierra Summit](#)

• Climate Policy Blogs

- [ClimatePolicy](#)
- [Prometheus](#)

• Climate Science Blogs

- [Real Climate](#)
- [Science Blogs](#)

• Environmentalists

- [Climate Progress](#)
- [DeSmog Blog](#)
- [Envirowonk](#)
- [Gristmill](#)
- [It's Getting Hot in Here](#)
- [Treehugger](#)

• Other Voices

- [Climate Debate Daily](#)

• From KQED

[Climate Watch official site](#)

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No Shockers in White House Climate Report

June 16, 2009 · Posted By Craig Miller · Filed Under [Agriculture](#), [Coastal](#), [Ecosystems](#), [Policy](#), [Warming](#), [Water](#)

The Obama Administration released a much-vaunted [update on climate change](#) today. In its nearly 200 pages, the report contains no new data and few new conclusions on the pace and impact of climate change across the U.S. Rather it affirms the core findings of recent research and sounds the alarm for rapid, definitive action to reduce carbon emissions and prepare for changes already on the way.

In a statement from Lawrence Berkeley National Lab, Evan Mills, one of the report's 28 co-authors, calls it "the most thorough and up-to-date review ever assembled of climate-change impacts observed to date as well as those anticipated in the future across the United States." Mills is one of two northern California scientists listed in the report's credits, along with Ben Santer of Lawrence Livermore National Lab.

One clear signal from the report is that it's time to move adaptation strategies to the front burner; preparing for climate effects already in the pipeline.

Louis Blumberg directs the California climate change team for The Nature Conservancy, and told me in a telephone interview this morning, "I would say it's a very clear signal that even if we dramatically reduce emissions immediately, which we need to do as soon as possible, we've already put enough CO₂ into the atmosphere where we're going to have significant changes to our way of life. And we need to begin now and plan to adapt to these unavoidable impacts and I think this report underscores that urgency."

But neither Blumberg nor Mills have given up on the mitigation side. Mills says "the good news is that the harshest impacts of future climate change can be avoided if the nation takes deliberate action soon."

Here is a summary of "key findings," taken directly from the report:

1. Global warming is unequivocal and primarily human-induced.

Global temperature has increased over the past 50 years. This observed increase is due primarily to human-induced emissions of heat-trapping gases.

2. Climate changes are underway in the United States and are projected to grow.

Climate-related changes are already observed in the United States and its coastal waters. These include increases in heavy downpours, rising temperature and sea level, rapidly retreating glaciers, thawing permafrost, lengthening growing seasons, lengthening ice-free seasons in the ocean and on lakes and rivers, earlier snowmelt, and alterations in river flows. These changes are projected to grow.

3. Widespread climate-related impacts are occurring now and are expected to increase.

Climate changes are already affecting water, energy, transportation, agriculture, ecosystems, and health. These impacts are different from region to region and will grow under projected climate change.



4. Climate change will stress water resources.

Water is an issue in every region, but the nature of the potential impacts varies. Drought, related to reduced precipitation, increased evaporation, and increased water loss from plants, is an important issue in many regions, especially in the West. Floods and water quality problems are likely to be amplified by climate change in most regions. Declines in mountain snowpack are important in the West and Alaska where snowpack provides vital natural water storage.



5. Crop and livestock production will be increasingly challenged.

Agriculture is considered one of the sectors most adaptable to changes in climate. However, increased heat, pests, water stress, diseases, and weather extremes will pose adaptation challenges for crop and livestock production.

6. Coastal areas are at increasing risk from sea-level rise and storm surge.

Sea-level rise and storm surge place many U.S. coastal areas at increasing risk of erosion and flooding, especially along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, Pacific Islands, and parts of Alaska. Energy and transportation infrastructure and other property in coastal areas are very likely to be adversely

affected.

7. Threats to human health will increase.

Health impacts of climate change are related to heat stress, waterborne diseases, poor air quality, extreme weather events, and diseases transmitted by insects and rodents. Robust public health infrastructure can reduce the potential for negative impacts.



8. Climate change will interact with many social and environmental stresses.

Climate change will combine with pollution, population growth, overuse of resources, urbanization, and other social, economic, and environmental stresses to create larger impacts than from any of these factors alone.

9. Thresholds will be crossed, leading to large changes in climate and ecosystems.

There are a variety of thresholds in the climate system and ecosystems. These thresholds determine, for example, the presence of sea ice and permafrost, and the survival of species, from fish to insect pests, with implications for society. With further climate change, the crossing of additional thresholds is expected.



10. Future climate change and its impacts depend on choices made today.

The amount and rate of future climate change depend primarily on current and future human-caused emissions of heat-trapping gases and airborne particles. Responses involve reducing emissions to limit future warming, and adapting to the changes that are unavoidable.

On KQED Public Radio's [Forum](#) for Wednesday, 6/17

9am Forum with Michael Krasny

White House Climate Report

We discuss the report, as well as federal climate change legislation from Congressmen Henry Waxman and Ed Markey. Guests include Dan Kammen, professor of energy at UC Berkeley and co-director of the Berkeley Institute of the Environment; and Katharine Hayhoe, professor of geophysics at Texas Tech University and a lead author of the climate study.

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11 Responses to "No Shockers in White House Climate Report"

1. [Anna Haynes](#) on June 16th, 2009 2:42 pm

Would you agree with Joe Romm's observation that: "Based on media coverage and my conversations with people, I can safely say that it is news to 99.9% of Americans that if we don't do anything to restrict greenhouse gas emissions we'll see scorching 9 to 11°F warming over most of inland U.S. by 2090 with Kansas above 90°F some 120 days a year. "

[\(link\)](#)

2. Craig Miller on June 16th, 2009 3:19 pm

Well, with that degree of granularity, sure I'd agree. I think people have a general idea that "global warming is bad." I wouldn't venture too far beyond that. Half still don't believe that it's anthropogenic (fewer in CA) and some don't even see the downside.

You may have seen that pie chart going around from a poll in which, allegedly, 3 out of 4 Americans asked had no idea that the term "cap & trade" has anything to do with climate change. The author failed to source it, so I can't vouch for the poll's validity—but it wouldn't surprise me in the least:

http://andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com/the_daily_dish/2009/05/what-is-cap-and-trade.html

3. [Anna Haynes](#) on June 16th, 2009 7:38 pm

> I think people have a general idea that "global warming is bad."

But they have zero feeling for the scale of "bad", or how much is already in the pipeline - and those are the things that need to be gotten across.

A couple other things from online -

A Climate Progress commenter said something worth repeating:

"If journalists don't make it a point to *always* connect the consequences to the temperature rise in their writing, then the average American (who usually doesn't bother to think beyond the next lane change) will simply shrug and say, "So what? I'll just turn up my air-conditioning.'"

David Orr's piece "Learning to Live With Climate Change Will Not Be Enough" ([link](#)) is powerful and convincing; I wish everyone could read it.

(e.g. "Arguments for mitigation...are rather like those for turning the water off in an overflowing tub before mopping.")

4. [Anna Haynes](#) on June 17th, 2009 2:13 am

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(e.g. "Arguments for mitigation...are rather like those for turning the water off in an overflowing tub before mopping.")

Sorry... forgot to say great post - can't wait to read your next one!

5. Craig Miller on June 17th, 2009 7:10 am

I like Orr's analogy as far as it goes. The critical difference is that you can see the tub overflowing and you know that turning the tap will stop it. For most people across the country, climate change isn't that visible (here in California we have a front-row seat). Voters and policymakers both have a poor track record when it comes to heading off future catastrophe—or making short-term sacrifices for the long-term good. I can't think of a lot of examples since WWII.

6. [Anna Haynes](#) on June 17th, 2009 7:26 pm

> Voters and policymakers both have a poor track record when it comes to heading off future catastrophe

Indeed. [If Only Gay Sex Caused Global Warming...](#)

7. [Russell Steele](#) on June 17th, 2009 8:13 pm

The GCCI report is not a scientific document. The Obama administration admits this document was stripped of its scientific discussion and rewritten by a paid PR firm that specializes in environmental advocacy. What scientist in their right mind would write:

1. Global warming is unequivocal and primarily human-induced. Global temperature has increased over the past 50 years. This observed increase is due primarily to human induced emissions of heat-trapping gases.

Only a political hack could write this statement. Even the IPCC political hacks were smart enough to cast the human caused warming as a probability. Where are the scientific findings in this document that proves CO2 is "unequivocal" responsible for the global warming. Where? Show me one. We have only been studying this very complex subject for 20 years and this report concluded with religious certainty that global warming "is primarily human-induced." Really now?

8. Steve Bloom on June 18th, 2009 4:08 am

Russ, at your age I'm afraid you need to learn to spend more time double-checking such assertions to make sure they make sense. It's as if you keep repeating them to convince yourself more than anyone else.

FYI, there's no contradiction between the quoted statement and the 2007 IPCC report.

9. [Russell Steele](#) on June 18th, 2009 7:01 am

Mr Bloom:

From the IPCC AR4: Anthropogenic warming over the last three decades has likely had a discernible influence at the global scale on observed changes in many physical and biological systems.

From the IPCC AR4: Where uncertainty in specific outcomes is assessed using expert judgment and statistical analysis of a body of evidence (e.g. observations or model results), then the following likelihood ranges are used to express the assessed probability of occurrence: virtually certain >99%; extremely likely >95%; very likely >90%; likely >66%; more likely than not > 50%; about as likely . . .

unequivocal: leaving no doubt; unambiguous : an unequivocal answer | he was unequivocal in condemning the violence.

likely: such as well might happen or be true; probable

The IPCC defined likely at 66%, that is not unequivocal, leaving no doubt. What did I miss?

10. Craig Miller on June 18th, 2009 10:53 am

With respect to Russell's first comment, the report credits list 28 people as the "author team." Most work for government agencies such as NOAA and USGS, though various universities and national labs are represented. In addition there are three "Co-Chairs and Editors-in-Chief" and a "Senior Science Writer," listed as Susan J. Hassol of Climate Communications, LLC. It's unclear how much influence Hassol had over the final draft but her website is:

<http://www.climatecommunication.org/>

There is also a 13-member review panel listed in the report's credits.

11. Steve Bloom on June 18th, 2009 5:18 pm

Russ, I'm afraid you're still confused. Note that your IPCC quote refers to the effects of anthropogenic warming and says nothing about the cause of the warming. Hint: The quote comes from the Working Group 2 report, not Working Group 1.

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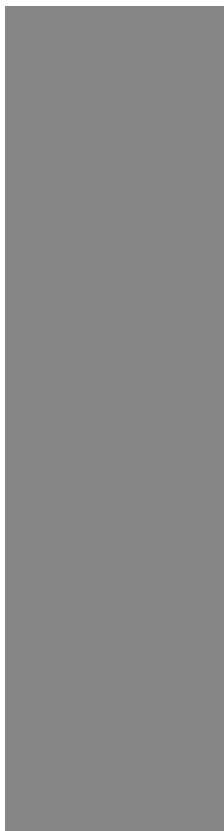
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